Administration

First Full Year since Delinking

1.1 Established in 1989, the Office of The Ombudsman had been operating like a Government department, staffed by civil servants on loan from the Administration and bound by all the Government's administrative and financial regulations. The year 2002/03 was the first full year of operation since the delinking of my Office on 19 December 2001 from Government systems, procedures and practices. We have established our own administrative systems and steadily reduced our reliance on services provided by Government departments save for those more cost-effective to continue using.

Memorandum of Administrative Arrangements (MAA)

1.2 I have completed discussions with the Administration to arrive at a final draft MAA as a guide for the administrative arrangements for my Office and its working relationship with the Administration. However, the Administration has yet to effect the formal exchange, due probably to the introduction of new financial arrangements for Government departments and publicly funded organisations. I am awaiting word from the Administration. This delay has not affected the operations of my Office as an independent corporation sole.

Financial Arrangements

1.3 The Administration's measures to contain the growth of public expenditure have impacted on the operation of my Office. To cope with an anticipated reduction of resources for the next few years, I have aborted the recruitment exercise for Chief Investigation Officers and redistributed the duties among the existing staff. With the increase in caseload in recent years, my staff are also expected to work under greater pressure in meeting our performance pledges, particularly when there is a sudden influx of complaints. As necessary, I will continue to engage temporary staff to supplement my regular force.

1.4 The salary component of my annual provision has been reduced in line with the civil service pay cut. As my staff are engaged on contract terms, I have given them an option to accept the revised salaries before effecting any pay reduction.

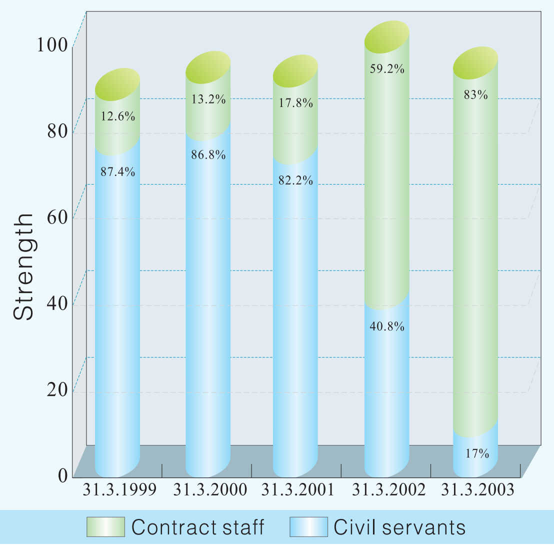
1.5 My aim is to maintain the current level of service by prudent use of available resources and regular review of our operations, staffing structure and work practices. Meanwhile, through building up a reserve from savings achieved, I hope to provide for development in the longer term.

Staffing

1.6 As at 31 March 2003, there were 76 staff members on contract (out of a total of 92), representing 83% of the entire workforce. About 75% of investigation officers have been replaced. The pace of replacement has had to be balanced against the need to maintain an adequate level of experience. I anticipate that the remaining 16 civil servants will be phased out completely within 2003/04 and my entire workforce will then be contract staff appointed under The Ombudsman Ordinance. I take this opportunity to record my appreciation for the dedication and

professionalism of all civil servants serving in our Office over the years.

Fig. 1.1 Contract staff in the Office



1.7 My two Assistant Ombudsmen, seconded from the civil service, are due to retire. I have successfully recruited through open competition two replacements, to report for duty in April and June 2003.

1.8 I have continued to employ temporary staff to deal with seasonal fluctuations of our caseload and to augment the shortfall in expertise resulting from the release of experienced civil servants. Such staff are remunerated either on a daily or case basis, depending on the operational requirements of the Office.

Review of Remuneration of Senior Staff

1.9 In January 2002, Government initiated an internal review of the remuneration of senior executives of 20 selected publicly funded organisations, including my Office. This resulted in Government deciding in February 2003 *inter alia* to maintain the structure, ranking, number and remuneration arrangements for the four top positions of my Office : i.e. my own post, my Deputy and the two Assistant Ombudsmen.

Staff Training

1.10 Our training and development strategy aims to provide for the continuing development of my staff. With most of them being new recruits, considerable efforts are required to upgrade their expertise. To this end, the strategy has been drawn up, to include an induction for new entrants, refresher on recurrent subjects and special sessions on such matters as aspects of our law or certain requisite skills. The programmes will be carried out or co-ordinated essentially by my administrative team and by the more experienced investigation officers.

1.11 Apart from using the Civil Service Training and Development Institute as our training agent, we will continue to engage outside agencies. Other than job-related training, workshops or experience sharing sessions such as our annual Professional Development Conference, we also have regular gatherings dubbed as "Ombuds Hours" when lighter issues are discussed or shared by all staff.

1.12 I am determined to develop my staff to be a competent team committed to contributing towards fair and open, transparent and accountable public administration.

ACCOMMODATION

1.13 We moved to our permanent premises at Shun Tak Centre on 6 September 2002. Ideally, the whole office should be accommodated on the same or at least adjoining floors. However, such an option would have cost much more. In the end, I decided to purchase premises on two separate floors at competitive prices. My directorate and all investigation staff are now accommodated on 30/F of the east tower, with the Resource Centre and my administration units on 25/F of the west tower. The purchase prices for these premises turned out to be record low for both towers. The inconvenience of operating from two towers is minimised by computer link, including webcams for conferences between the premises.

Fig. 1.2 **Reception counter of the new Office**

COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE OFFICE

1.14 This year, we received eight complaints against staff manners and working procedures. My administrative staff have critically examined these complaints and I personally considered the findings before authorising the reply and follow-up action.

Fig. 1.3 **Complaints against the Office**

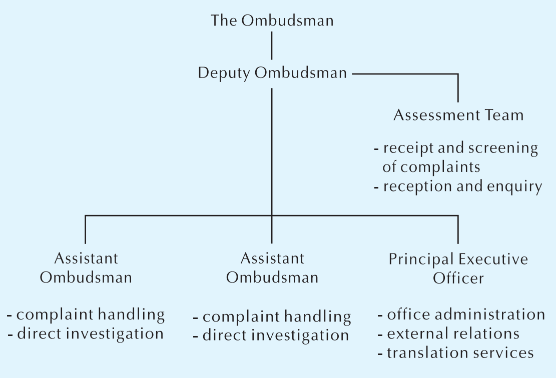
Conclusions / Nature of complaints	Substantiated	Partially substantiated	Un-substantiated	Incapable of determination
Staff manners (including delay and negligence)	1	-	4	2
Working procedures	-	1	-	-
Total	8			

We take such complaints most seriously as each provides us with the opportunity to review our services to the public. We treasure the lessons learned and are always ready to improve our work practices and procedures. However, allegations against staff are often due to dissatisfaction with my decisions on investigation results. As such, they do not necessarily reflect on the performance of my staff.

ORGANISATION

1.15 My Office is simply structured:

Fig. 1.4 **Organisation**



An organisation chart, in greater detail, is at **Annex 1**. My practice of keeping as trim a team as possible will continue.